

# Flathead County Transportation Advisory Committee

## Minutes

Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Meeting was held via zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/97299137971?pwd=V25SRGQ5S1ZFUFHGOEpscW16eVdEZz09>

Meeting ID: 972 9913 7971

Passcode: 389743

Kyle Waterman called meeting to order at 10:30 a.m.

**Members Present:** Randy Brodehl (Commissioner), Jenny Cloutier, Jeny Covill, Shawna Himsi, Marceen Liechti, Marcy Roberts, Robert Smith, Tagen Vine, Kevin Warrington, Kyle Waterman (Chair)

**Staff Present:** Lisa Sheppard (Agency on Aging Director), Dale Novak (Transit Manager), Kristina Stone (Transit Office Coordinator), Elizabeth Wood (Dispatcher), Alan Gilbertson

**Guests:** Seven guests were in attendance: Wade Kline and Mark Rohweder (KLJ Engineering), Karin Hilding (City of Whitefish), Tom Tabler (City of Kalispell), Susan Nicosia (City of Columbia Falls), James Freyholtz and Vicki Crnich (MDT)

**Call to Order:** Chair Kyle Waterman opened the meeting.

**Public Comments:** There was no public comment.

**Chair Opening Remarks:** Kyle welcomed everyone to the meeting. Given that we are engaged in annual planning and undergoing significant changes within transit and in the Valley as a whole, he encouraged members to be thinking beyond COVID and about what we want the system to look like going forward and what our highest priorities should be, noting that one of those priorities is hiring a permanent transit manager. All those in attendance introduced themselves.

**Approval of Minutes:** Members reviewed the minutes of the October 1, 2020 meeting. Tagen moved to approve the minutes. Randy Brodehl seconded. All in favor. Motion Passed.

### **Presentation on Cities' Transportation Plan Updates- Wade Kline, KLJ Engineering**

- Lisa thanked Wade for his willingness to share some of his preliminary data with us and for his time.
- Wade explained that he has been working on new twenty-year Transportation Plans with Kalispell, Columbia Falls and Whitefish. Whitefish and Columbia Falls are both about 25% of the way through the process, while Kalispell is about 70% done. The Kalispell Plan is also looking at the Evergreen area. The planning process for all three cities includes multiple opportunities for public input, and transit has been part of those discussions.
- Wade presented preliminary travel study results that show opportunities for public transit to help address transportation needs, particularly in the north-south corridor in and between Kalispell and Whitefish and the Reserve Drive area. Wade noted that the origin to destination data they are capturing, including key patterns, will be useful in future transit planning.

- Wade presented information about travel to and from the airport.
- Wade noted the City of Whitefish has the most interest in public transit as a potential solution to some of their mobility challenges, including park-n-rides, service to the airport and coordination with the Snow Bus.
- Members asked questions about the data presented and about the data collection process.

#### **Discussion- TAC Priorities for FY 2022 - Lisa Sheppard Director, Flathead County AOA**

- Lisa noted members will be voting on the annual Transportation Coordination Plan at the February meeting and today is an opportunity for members to give input on the Plan.
- Lisa reviewed the ***Update on Transit Issues/Projects*** handout and discussion followed:
  - **Pending separation of transit from the AOA.** Lisa mentioned that transit has grown exponentially over the past 8 years and that separation would be a good move both structurally and financially. Lisa added that all three commissioners are on board with the split.
    - An update was given regarding the new Transit Director position. A job description has been sent to HR. We have also obtained the services of an executive recruiting firm that will help us find the replacement.
    - **Question-** When is the separation of the departments likely to happen?
      - **Answer-** Commissioner Brodehl explained that the commissioners might come to a decision in January and the separation would possibly happen in February or March.
  - **Mountain Climber rebranding effort:**
    - MDT has approved using CARES Act funds to wrap the vehicles. Most will be completed by the end of March 2021.
    - Snow Ghost, the firm that designed the MC logo and wraps, is working with us on a new website.
    - Since Mountain Climber is a service brand, the new department will most likely be called something generic like Flathead County Public Transportation to allow for evolving branding over time.
  - **On-Demand service and software:**
    - **Question** - Kevin asked what our measure of success will be for the On-Demand service.
      - **Answer-** Lisa noted that, ultimately, we will want to see ridership equaling or exceeding pre-COVID fixed route/paratransit numbers, but we're also looking at customer satisfaction and the degree to which we are serving passengers who benefit from transit but couldn't access it before because of the inherent limitations in our fixed route system.
    - **Comment** - Dale talked about the software increasing the efficiency of the system, making it possible to provide more rides with existing resources.
    - **Question** - Will we be bringing back any fixed city runs?
      - **Answer-** Not in the near-term. We have the option to re-introduce fixed routes at any time, and the software we are looking at would support an improved paratransit system as well. Dale also commented that we could consider any number of options, including commuters, that can be integrated into the system.
    - **Question** - Marcy asked what this looks like for the Premium Dial-A-Ride area now and going forward.
      - **Answer-** We're serving the former Premium Dial-A-Ride area with On-Demand service now. Going forward, it depends on how many resources we have and how much capacity we gain using the new software.
    - **Comment** - Kyle mentioned that with the rebranding and system changes we need to educate the public and develop a marketing plan.
- Kyle asked members to discuss any opportunities or obstacles they see in achieving our goals moving forward.

- **Comment** - Shawna mentioned that she is excited about the rebranding but is also wondering if the lack of a route with a set schedule will be a problem for some riders.
  - **Comment**- Lisa mentioned that people will have even more flexibility and convenience with the On-Demand service and will have more control over their own scheduling once we have the new software/app (and can still call in if they need to).
- **Comment**- Commissioner Brodehl said an obstacle going forward might be funding and that we need to make sure we're getting the best value for the taxpayer.
- **Comment**- Lisa added that funding drives everything we do. Looking forward, we feel that rebranding to the Mountain Climber is more inclusive of the community as a whole and might be more attractive to potential funding partners.
- **Comment**- Kyle mentioned that it would be really great if we could get local hotels to partner with us. He also posed the question: Who are essential partners are that aren't yet at the table?
  - **Comment**- Jenny said she feels Glacier National Park is as essential partner as they drive so much of the visitation to the area.
  - **Comment**- Kyle mentioned that once the separation takes place we need to keep Lisa involved as an AOA resource.
  - **Comment**- Tagen suggested visitor centers and chambers of commerce as important partners.
  - **Comment**- Lisa said we need to continue discussion with the cities and collaborate where our priorities intersect.
  - **Comment**- Commissioner Brodehl indicated public transportation shouldn't compete with private industry in the Valley.
    - **Comment**- Lisa noted we are required to reach out to private industry, invite them to participate in our planning process and coordinate our services with them whenever possible.
    - **Question**- Shawna asked what private provides still exist in the area now that Glacier Taxi is out of business. **Answer** – Arrow Shuttle and Rocky Mountain Transportation (Snow Bus)
  - **Comment**- Kyle suggested TAC members can help recruit partners and encourage community engagement.

**Surveys:** Lisa mentioned that we currently have an on-board survey and a general public survey underway and asked for TAC member assistance in circulating the public survey.

#### **Closing Comments**

- Lisa suggested we could add a January meeting if members would like additional opportunity to provide TCP input. After some discussion, members decided to schedule a meeting for Thursday January 7<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 p.m.

#### **Member Announcements**

- None at this time

Meeting Closed at 12:10 p.m.